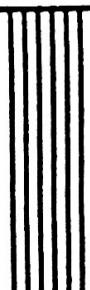


Photo by Susan Johann  
A scene from the Signature Theatre production of "Marriage Play." Set design by E. David  
Cosier.

# EDWARD ALBEE'S MARRIAGE PLAY



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**MARRIAGE PLAY**

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World Premiere at Vienna's English Theatre,  
Vienna, Austria, May 17, 1987.

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Edward Albee's **MARRIAGE PLAY** was produced by Signature Theatre Company (James Houghton, Artistic Director; Thomas C. Proehl, Managing Director; Elliot Fox, Associate Director), in New York City, on October 1, 1993. It was directed by James Houghton; the set design was by E. David Cosier; the costume design was by Teresa Snider-Stein; the lighting design was by Jeffrey S. Koger; the fight director was Marty Pistone and the production stage manager was Kathleen M. Nolan. The cast was as follows:

GILLIAN ..... Kathleen Butler  
JACK ..... Tom Klunis

The American premiere of Edward Albee's **MARRIAGE PLAY** was co-produced by the McCarter Theatre (Emily Mann, Artistic Director; Jeffrey Woodward, Managing Director), of Princeton, New Jersey, and the Alley Theatre (Gregory Boyd, Artistic Director; Stephen J. Albert, Executive Director), of Houston Texas. It was first presented at the Alley Theatre on January 8, 1992 and subsequently at the McCarter Theatre on February 14, 1992. It was directed by Edward Albee; the set and costume designs were by Derek McLane; the lighting design was by Howell Binkley; the movement coordinator was Chuck Hudson and the production stage manager was Susie Cordon. The cast was as follows:

GILLIAN ..... Shirley Knight  
JACK ..... Tom Klunis

Edward Albee's **MARRIAGE PLAY** was commissioned by, and received its premiere, at Vienna's English Theatre, Ltd., Vienna, Austria, on May 17, 1987. The cast was as follows:

GILLIAN ..... Kathleen Butler  
JACK ..... Tom Klunis

## CHARACTERS

Gillian, a woman in her early 50s  
Jack, a man in his middle 50s

## PLACE

A suburban home

## TIME

3:30 on a weekday afternoon; late spring

## MARRIAGE PLAY

*Gillian sits in a chair, reading, laughing occasionally. After a bit Jack enters through the door.*

GILLIAN. *(Looks up from her book; fairly friendly.)* Hello.

JACK. *(Pause.)* Hello.

GILLIAN. You're home early. *(Gillian reads, giggles. Jack puts his briefcase down, looks at her, looks back to his briefcase.)*

JACK. Yes. I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. *(Thinks about it, frowns.)* What do you mean?

JACK. I'm leaving you. *(Are you an idiot?)* I'm leaving you!

GILLIAN. *(Back to her book; dismissive.)* Of course.

JACK. *Laugh if you want.*

GILLIAN. I wasn't. Not right then. Earlier, *yes.* Before you came in.

JACK. *Laugh if you want.*

GILLIAN. *(Cheerful.)* Did you have a bad day?

JACK. *(Pause.)* What do you mean?

GILLIAN. Did you have.... What do you *mean* what do I mean?

JACK. A bad day.

GILLIAN. You *did!* Oh, I'm *sorry!*

JACK. No.

GILLIAN. *(To get it right.)* No. No? No what?

JACK. I did not have a bad day.

GILLIAN. *(Thinks about that.)* Did you have a *good* day?

JACK. *(Pause; suspicious.)* What do you *mean*?

GILLIAN. If you did not have a bad day, then perhaps it follows you had a *good* day.

JACK. *(Not friendly.)* Middling.

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. I had a middling day. I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. Are you having a dalliance?

JACK. A what?

GILLIAN. A dalliance; another dalliance. Are you dallying ... with someone? Are you having yet another one of your dalliances?

JACK. Dalliance, as in light-hearted romance?

GILLIAN. Well ... yes.

JACK. (Considers it.) No.

GILLIAN. Aha. Are you engaged once again in one or several profoundly involved and/or involving relationships — outside of your home, of course — of a deeply romantic and/or sexual nature?

JACK. My dear woman, this is not to be dealt lightly with. (Thinks about what he said.) With *lightly*; dealt with lightly.

GILLIAN. (An abrupt, hysterical laugh.) Certainly not! One or several profoundly involved and/or involving relationships of a deeply romantic and/or sexual nature occurring side by side a marriage of some duration and persistence between two heretofore quick and rational people is not a matter to be dealt lightly with, or with lightly. (Pause.) What do I mean?

JACK. No, I know what you mean, but that is not what I meant, is not what we're about here. What do I mean?

GILLIAN. Yes; what do you mean? (Afterthought; no rage.) You cringing piece of filth!

JACK. (Smile.) Now, now. (Pause.) You *did* hear me say I was leaving? Departing, taking my life and two suitcases ...

GILLIAN. I recall something of the sort. (So solicitous.) What is it, you poor old thing?

JACK. (Smile.) Now, now. (Pause.) You look up one day from your desk; you are sitting there in your usual manner, doing your usual things — and they are neither boring nor exciting: whatever they may have been they no longer are; they are merely your usual things. Well, you look up from them, are amazed by your familiar surroundings, are startled by the stranger who has been your secretary for fifteen years. You realize your life is about to change ... profoundly; either that or you are mad.

GILLIAN. (Too brightly.) It was an interesting day, then.

JACK. She chirped.

GILLIAN. She chirped.

JACK. And you are not mad; you are, perhaps, if anything, too on target. Yes; quite interesting; my life is about to change, and profoundly, you say to yourself — so to speak.

GILLIAN. Profoundly?

JACK. Profoundly! "May I help you? Is there something I can do?" your stranger of fifteen years says to you. What is her name? Her name is absurdly Irish.

GILLIAN. (Smiles.) Kathleen O'Houlihan; Kathleen *Begorra* O'Houlihan.

JACK. (Puzzled.) Is that *it*? Did you make that up?

GILLIAN. Yes.

JACK. Which?

GILLIAN. Whichever.

JACK. "May you *what*?" you reply.

GILLIAN. "May I help you?"

JACK. Don't help. "May I *help* you?" she asked, regarding my preoccupation with proper concern. "No, no; it's nothing," I replied. Should I have said ... well, you can't say — especially to a total stranger, whether you've known her fifteen years, or not — "No, no, it's everything; I think my life is undergoing the profoundest change."

GILLIAN. Most profound.

JACK. What?

GILLIAN. Most profound; not profoundest. It may be right, but it sounds wrong.

JACK. Pedant! In any event, *can* you?

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. What?

GILLIAN. Can you *what*?

JACK. (Tiny pause.) Say that: I think my life is undergoing and so on. *Can* you.

GILLIAN. I don't know. *Can* you?

JACK. Do you *try* to vex me?

GILLIAN. (Kittenish.) Only when you really want me to.

JACK. (Looks at her for a moment, then away.) Perhaps if I'd truly known you I wouldn't have married you. I'm sure if I'd truly known you I wouldn't have.

GILLIAN. (*Businesslike.*) Oh, you would have.  
JACK. (*Considers the rug.*) Probably.

GILLIAN. Arranged marriages are the best — never see the bride until the marriage day, family puts it all together, for social reasons, or business ones; you never see the bride until the altar, and the veil is raised; your heart stops, for there she is — hairy hippopotamus ...

JACK. So, you send her off for something, something you actually need, though not very much, and you begin to mull it: what the fuck is happening?

GILLIAN. Change of life. You men have it.

JACK. (*Irked.*) I know we do.

GILLIAN. It's like breasts: you have those, *too*, but you don't think about them; you don't *use* them much.

JACK. I think about my breasts all the time ...

GILLIAN. (*Chuckles.*) You do not!

JACK. (*High horse.*) They are an obsession has probably stood in the way of corporate advancement. I'm sure they have; you can't spend all your time in the company men's room, your shirt open, your tie around your back, your fingers to your nipples, deeply tranced, without it affecting your career — high management walking in and all.

GILLIAN. (*Far away.*) I wonder when I'll have mine.

JACK. (*Snappish.*) You're probably having it; that's probably what's wrong. (*Gillian throws a magazine at him. It hits him, or it does not, preferably does.*) Don't do that.

GILLIAN. (*Glum.*) Pick it up.

JACK. (*Bored.*) Pick it up yourself. (*Some enthusiasm.*) Do you know the feeling? The one I'm talking about?

GILLIAN. Me? Naah! Me!? (*Awful parody.*) I look up one day from my stove. I am standing there in my usual manner, doing my usual things — and they are neither boring nor exciting ...

JACK. (*Half-angry.*) All right.

GILLIAN. I look up from my familiar burners and am startled by the object has been my refrigerator for fifteen years. I realize my cooking is about to profoundly change ...

JACK. (*Angry now.*) All right!! (*Half to himself.*) I should have

throttled you years ago.

GILLIAN. Poor darling: you have the most predictable crises; you should read more.

JACK. (*Gets up.*) I think I'll come in again. (*Picks up briefcase.*)

GILLIAN. What! Go out and come back in?

JACK. (*Ugly mimicry.*) What!? Go out and come back in?

GILLIAN. He mimicked.

JACK. He mimicked. Yes; go out and come back in. (*Moves toward the door.*) I'll try once again.

GILLIAN. (*Mimicking.*) Hello; I'm leaving you.

JACK. (*As Jack exits.*) Pay proper attention.

GILLIAN. (*After him, saluting.*) Yes, Sir! (*Alone; imitates a child.*) You? Weaving witta me!? Oh, no! Say it isn't so! (*Remembers something; in her usual voice.*) Sad husband, sad wife; Sad day; sad life. (*Jack reenters.*)

JACK. (*Looks about.*) Hello.

GILLIAN. (*Looks straight at him.*) Hello.

JACK. I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. Hm? I'm sorry? I was reading; I didn't hear you.

JACK. That was the *last* time; you are *not* reading *now*.

GILLIAN. I thought we were repeating what we ...

JACK. (*Fuming.*) I said I would do it *again!* I said I would come back in and do it again!

GILLIAN. Yes, but ...

JACK. I did not intend a time warp! The first time you were *reading*; this time you were *not*.

GILLIAN. (*Feigned indignation.*) Well! I'm sorry!

JACK. If you will not pay proper attention ...

GILLIAN. I try! It's hard, but I try!

JACK. (*Dogmatic.*) I'm leaving you. It came on me today; a bell went off.

GILLIAN. A bell went off?

JACK. Yes.

GILLIAN. Where?

JACK. I beg your pardon?

GILLIAN. Where?! You said a bell went off. Where did it go off?

JACK. In my head. A bell went off in my head. You've heard the expression.

GILLIAN. (Thinks about it.) Not for years.

JACK. (Not nice.) Yeah? Where've you been living? (Level.) A bell went off in my head; there I was at my desk and all at once it came to me, crystallized, the ... made sense of the feelings of doom, the unfocused anxieties, the gnawing discontents, the ...

GILLIAN. I get the picture.

JACK. (Sincere.) I hope you do.

GILLIAN. Oh, I do! (Tiny pause.) Feelings of doom? Really ... doom?

JACK. Well, something close.

GILLIAN. Be *precise*. Doom I'll really fear for you, really *worry*. Gnawing discontents? Well, what *else* is new? Unfocused anxieties? Hanh!! (Sees him leaving.) Where are you going?

JACK. I'll try it once again; I'll give you one more chance!

GILLIAN. (Mock supplication.) Weawy? You're gonna give me one more chance?

JACK. To pay *attention*! To be *serious* about it!

GILLIAN. Perhaps we should put in a revolving door. (Jack walks over to her, and raises his arm as if to strike her.)

JACK. Pay. (Pause.) Attention. (Turns; exits.)

GILLIAN. (After Jack leaves; curiously uninvolved.) You have done everything at least once too often. (Jack reenters.)

JACK. Hello. (Pause.) I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. (Shakes her head; clucks.) Darn! Ya know, I knew it! I had a feeling! (Jack turns on his heel, exits. Gillian turns pages, ignores exit. Jack reenters.)

JACK. Hello.

GILLIAN. (Absorbed in her book.) Oh! Hello!

JACK. I thought I should tell you that .... What are you *doing*?

GILLIAN. Hm?

JACK. What are you *DOING*??!

GILLIAN. (Cheerful.) I'm reading.

JACK. What?

GILLIAN. I'm *reading*.

JACK. No! *What! What* are you reading?

GILLIAN. My book.

JACK. (Long pause.) What ... book?

GILLIAN. (Overly casual; looks at the cover as if she had never seen it before.) Oh ... *The Book of Days*; my book; *The Book of Days*.

JACK. Never heard of it.

GILLIAN. Oh, it's not published.

JACK. (Pause.) What do you mean?

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. What do you *mean*!?

GILLIAN. What do I mean by it's not published?

JACK. (Calm, but Jack may hit her.) Yes.

GILLIAN. I mean that it is not published; that is what I mean by it is not published.

JACK. I know.

GILLIAN. Then why do you ask? (Jack makes an attempt to grab the book; Gillian keeps it.) No you don't!

JACK. I want to *see* it!

GILLIAN. You haven't wanted to see it for years! All the years it's been right here and you haven't wanted to see it.

JACK. What do you mean "all the years"? You've been reading the same book for years and years? What are you, slow?

GILLIAN. Not reading. Writing.

JACK. (Pause.) Pardon?

GILLIAN. Not reading. Writing.

JACK. What do you mean?

GILLIAN. It is a book I am writing. It is called *The Book of Days*. (Shrugs.) It is a book I am writing.

JACK. (Smiles, almost laughs; mimics.) "It is a book I am writing." You're writing a *book*!?

GILLIAN. (Annoyed.) Well, don't make it sound like it's something *beyond* me! "You're writing a book!?" You, barely brighter than a gazelle, or frying pan, *you* write a book!?

JACK. (Delight.) A book.

GILLIAN. (Amounting to justification.) Well, it's not *fiction*.

JACK. What do you mean?

GILLIAN. It's more of a journal — a kind of record.

JACK. (*Humoring a child.*) Ohhhhhh, a diary!  
GILLIAN. (*Annoyed.*) No, not a diary, not a "dear diary." It's a record, it's a clinical record.  
JACK. (*Eyeing.*) What a thick book; let me see it.  
GILLIAN. (*Protecting it.*) NO!  
JACK. What do you mean "a clinical record"?  
GILLIAN. It's ... well, it's a set of notations.  
JACK. What?  
GILLIAN. A set of notations.  
JACK. Of what?  
GILLIAN. What?  
JACK. It's a set of notations.  
GILLIAN. Yes! Yes, it is.  
JACK. (*Losing patience.*) Of what!? Of what!?  
GILLIAN. Of our making love.  
JACK. (*Pause.*) I beg your pardon?  
GILLIAN. Every time we have made love I have notated it here; I have commented on it — duration, positions, time of day, necessity, degrees of enjoyability, snatches of conversation, the weather. (*Shrugs again.*) You know ... a record.  
JACK. (*Pause.*) I don't believe you. Let me see that!  
GILLIAN. No! Why not?  
JACK. Why *not*!? *Nobody* would do a thing like that!  
GILLIAN. Why not? Thirty years of marriage, nearly three thousand ... events.  
JACK. Three thousand!!  
GILLIAN. Yes; how many did you think?  
JACK. It never occurred to me to.... A record of three thousand fucks?  
GILLIAN. Nearly.  
JACK. My God! The book of fucks?  
GILLIAN. *The Book of Days*, actually.  
JACK. The what?  
GILLIAN. *The Book of Days*. That's what I call it. I keep it by my chair; I write in it; I read from it; it amuses me sometimes.  
JACK. (*Cold.*) Read from it.  
GILLIAN. (*Gay.*) Choose a page.

JACK. What?  
GILLIAN. Choose a page; choose a number.  
JACK. (*Pause.*) At random?  
GILLIAN. Sure; be brave; choose a number.  
JACK. Eight hundred.  
GILLIAN. What?  
JACK. Eight hundred!  
GILLIAN. Whyever did you choose *that* number?  
JACK. You said to choose a number; you said to ...  
GILLIAN. Yes, but ...  
JACK. You said be brave; you said to ...  
GILLIAN. Yes, but ... eight hundred; so ... rounded, so ... predictable.  
JACK. (*Cold.*) Eight hundred!  
GILLIAN. Eight hundred? All right. (*Opens book, finds page.*) Eight hundred, eight hundred, eight ... aha; eight hundred. "Will he never learn?!"  
JACK. Will he never learn *what*!?  
GILLIAN. Who?  
JACK. *I*! Will I never learn *what*!  
GILLIAN. (*Casual.*) I don't know. That was years ago.  
JACK. What kind of woman *are* you?!  
GILLIAN. You tell me!  
JACK. What!?  
GILLIAN. (*Louder.*) You tell me.  
JACK. (*Steely.*) Eight hundred and ten.  
GILLIAN. (*Rifling.*) All rightie.... Eight hundred and ten. "Sunday morning, late, warm for the season, coffee on the bedside table, the papers all over; sex hangs in the air — like a moisture, and you know it will happen and you know it will be good and it does and it is."  
JACK. (*Pleased.*) Oh. I see. That's nice — Hemingway, but nice. Do another one.  
GILLIAN. Don't you think you should quit while you're ahead? Hemingway?  
JACK. "You know it will be good and it does and it is," or whatever.  
GILLIAN. (*Looks down at the page, as if inspecting a flyspeck.*)

That's Hemingway?

JACK. (A little ugly.) Do another one; do twelve hundred; do twelve hundred and six.

GILLIAN. (Shrugs.) O.K. Twelve hundred and six. (Finds it.) Twelve hundred and six; "Nothing much; O.K. but nothing much."

JACK. (Pause.) That's it?

GILLIAN. (Business-like.) Well, some days — some nights — aren't that ... special; you know?

JACK. (Walks to the other end of the room; regards her.) Then you've been keeping a record of my performance, or my prowess, if you will ...

GILLIAN. Don't be silly.

JACK. ... of my performance in bed through all the years of our marriage?

GILLIAN. (So reasonable.) Yes!

JACK. What kind of woman *are* you!?

GILLIAN. You tell me, remember?

JACK. That's sick.

GILLIAN. (Serious; a little sad.) No.... It's reasonable, and interesting; a record of our touching.

JACK. I'll never be able to go to bed with you again.

GILLIAN. (Pause.) Well, since you're leaving me ... what will it matter?

JACK. (Having only half-heard.) Hm? Pardon?

GILLIAN. (Gentle; triste.) Since you're leaving me ... what does it matter?

JACK. (Puzzled.) Oh. Right. (Almost regretful.) I'd almost forgotten, for a moment.

GILLIAN. Just because we announce a plan, it doesn't ...

JACK. (To stop her; but gently.) I'm *leaving* you.

GILLIAN. You *are* having a dalliance.

JACK. I don't dally.

GILLIAN. Then this is a siege.

JACK. This is a departure. If I cause you any hurt ...

GILLIAN. Listen to you!

JACK. ... any *pain* ...

GILLIAN. Oh, Jesus!

JACK. You don't take me seriously.

GILLIAN. Oh, I do; I *do*. There was a time I *didn't*. In the beginning — in *our* beginning, I did ...

JACK. You *do* want me to hit you, don't you?

GILLIAN. ... and then I realized that perhaps I needn't, and therefore I did *not* ...

JACK. Right in the chops, as my uncle used to say.

GILLIAN. ... but it's been growing on me lately — the taking again of you seriously. Oh ... yes ... I take you seriously.

JACK. Or was it my grandfather on my mother's side?

GILLIAN. Everyone takes sides. Who is she? Who is the chippie?

JACK. Who's what?

GILLIAN. The chippie; who's the chippie?

JACK. I'm not changing my mind ... I'm changing my *life*. You must learn the difference.

GILLIAN. Between your mind and your life.

JACK. I *will* strike you.

GILLIAN. I dare say. Poor darling. Poor *me*, while we're at it.

JACK. (Mimicking.) Who is she? Who's the chippie?

GILLIAN. Yes!

JACK. There's no one! There's everyone, and there's no one. Maybe that's it.

GILLIAN. (Pinning it down.) No one.

JACK. No one. Not the blonde on the settee, not the brunette rubbing herself against the chair; not this one, not that one, no one ... except for the lady I am — with no success — having a sad and useless conversation with. (Pause.) NO one.

GILLIAN. (Noncommittal.) I see.

JACK. (Pause.) So.

GILLIAN. Yes. So.

JACK. Do twenty-six.

GILLIAN. (Preoccupied.) What?

JACK. Do something. Do twenty-six.

GILLIAN. Why bother?

JACK. (Contained fury.) Do twenty-six!

GILLIAN. (*Reluctant.*) You want to go way back there. To our beginnings. Why bother?

JACK. Twenty-six!!

GILLIAN. (*Still reluctant.*) Our first two weeks. The liner. Those islands. Why bother?

JACK. Twenty-six!

GILLIAN. (*Suddenly.*) What I remember most is everyone knew we were honeymooners — what a funny word! — were honeymooners, were screwing each other cross-eyed and maybe even freshly — old fashioned, I mean: virginal until the knot, and all that. Odd about the knot — about knots: tie the knot; undo the knot.

JACK. Twenty-six!

GILLIAN. Hush. Everyone would look at us. What did we do, carry placards? — "Honeymooners;icky-fack; new at it." It must have been so ... obvious. I know we gazed into each other's eyes a lot, heads slightly tilted, mooncow sounds probably emanating. They all treated us like ... furry little animals! "Aw! Aren't they cute!!" As if we were retarded in some ... pleasing way — no drool or wildness, no danger, but ... childlike. "Awwwww!!! Aren't they cute! Little babies go fuck now?"

JACK. Twenty-six!

GILLIAN. Every time we came up from below — no matter *what* we'd been up to — "Aw, look! The bunnies have been at it! Cute bunnies!!" or if we left our terrible table — remember the Maltese woman? "I have no money," she whined? — if we left our terrible table or the awful games and went below — to fuck, of course — out their elbows went, nudge, nudge.

JACK. Twenty-six!!

GILLIAN. (*Ignores him.*) And on the tenders, ship to shore — or shore to ship, for that matter ... we would hold hands — we held hands a lot then — and they would look at us, at our twined fingers, coo and murmur.

JACK. Stop vamping! Twenty-six, you wanton bitch!!

GILLIAN. Twenty-six? All right; twenty-six. (*Seeks it.*) Twenty-six. (*Reads to herself a little; giggles.*) Oh ... all right. (*Reads.*)

I am selfish by nature, I think, or self-aware, certainly, to a degree not entertained by many. I have always been so. I am not ashamed of it; indeed, it sets me apart from — above, I think — many.

JACK. James.

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. Henry James; an attempt at Henry James.

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. What you just read.

GILLIAN. Oh, thank you!

JACK. A poor attempt at Henry James.

GILLIAN. Well ... some is better than none. Let me see: (*Reads again.*) But he has taken me to a level of it — (*To him, not reading.*) of the self-awareness I was talking about before ...

JACK. I can follow.

GILLIAN. You never know — convoluted, James and all. (*Reads again.*) ... to a level of it I have been unprepared for. Is it simply that no one has stroked the small of my back just so before? Or is it I know he is hardening as he does it? Is it the terror and longing in his eyes when he is on me? Or is it that I see I am imagining and knowing the same time the same thing? Is it that I have come into contact with some ... essence, some animal ... something?

JACK. D.H. Lawrence now ... sort of. What happened to Hemingway? What happened to James?

GILLIAN. I'm eclectic. Do you want me to go on?

JACK. As who?

GILLIAN. Whom?

JACK. Who.

GILLIAN. You say.

JACK. Yourself. Try that; try being you.

GILLIAN. I've been.

JACK. Hm?

GILLIAN. I've been trying that. No good. It leads to ... boredom, middle-age panic, dalliance, threats of departure. Perhaps we should put in a turnstile — make some money while we're at it. (*Gets no reaction.*) No? I've tried myself: thirty years. Don't you ... recall? Is the image not familiar to you?

"Who is that lady reading when I come home from wherever." (*Terrible butch imitation.*) "Stopped off for a coupla beers with the guys; you know — coupla laughs, coupla beers." (*Parthenetical.*) ... reeking of bizarre perfume, worn, we take it, by one of the more ... advanced guys. (*Back to simple imitation of him.*) "Who is that lady? I see her everywhere — answering the door when guests arrive, in my bed when I wake up in the morning, legs in the air or butt up when I'm in the mood. Who is she? She's next to me when I fall asleep — when I'm home, that is. Who can she be?" I've tried that, sweetie; it doesn't work. I've tried it for thirty years. Give me another suggestion.

JACK. (*Sad shaking of head.*) You're hopeless.

GILLIAN. (*Pause.*) Well ... someone is, or something. (*Reckless.*) Leaving me, are you?!

JACK. (*Preoccupied.*) Uh-hum.

GILLIAN. (*Quiet; not rapidly.*) You filthy, thoughtless, selfish, aging, wanton, frightened, misunderstanding, vain, foolish memory of the man I prayed would want me.

JACK. (*So weary.*) Oh ... be still.

GILLIAN. Leave me; I don't care. (*New thought.*) Hunh! Thank God the kids are gone.

JACK. (*From a distance.*) What?

GILLIAN. I said thank God the kids are gone. If they were still here, having to put up with *this*! Or is that part of it — the fact that they're gone? — Living their own lives now?

JACK. (*Reluctant.*) We'll have to tell them.

GILLIAN. (*Snorts.*) Hanh! You tell 'em. (*Gillian rises, moves to exit.*)

JACK. Where are you going?

GILLIAN. I'm going to get a drink.

JACK. You don't drink. You don't smoke, and you don't drink.

GILLIAN. Better late than never. (*Exits.*)

JACK. I suppose so. (*So Gillian can hear off-stage.*) I had a grandmother, teetotaled, everything. Started smoking when she was seventy, took her first drink five years later, became a regular. I suppose she would have taken to the streets when

she was eighty if the weather had been better. Nice lady; taught me bridge — Culbertson, that long ago. Nice lady; had a Pekinese — awful old dog, almost as old as she was, though not as nice, couldn't play bridge either; had an adenoid problem ... the Peke. (*Gillian reenters; glass and bottle.*)

GILLIAN. What Peke?

JACK. My grandmother's.

GILLIAN. (*Taking a swig.*) On whose side?

JACK. Mine as often as not. Nice lady. (*Reading from Gillian's book.*) "Do I have a special spot? Is there such a thing? Has he hit upon it — this way and that after all this time! Will he find it again? Should I tell him I have one? At least that he's found it whether I have one or not? Will he believe me?"

GILLIAN. Stay tuned.

JACK. What are you doing ... drinking it straight out of the bottle? Starting right out big?

GILLIAN. Why do we drink? I mean, why do you drink ... not for the effect? I thought you drank to get drunk.

JACK. You're a beginner. You drink like that you'll just get sick. You'll throw up and you won't get drunk or anything ... just messy. Do things right.

GILLIAN. Let *me* handle it. You do the leaving, I'll do the drinking.

JACK. (*A warning.*) O.K.

GILLIAN. Messy? Do things right? "Hello; I'm leaving you." "Oh, really? That's interesting." Don't talk to me about right; don't talk to *me* about messy.

JACK. It isn't that *way*. It isn't "Hello, I'm leaving you."

GILLIAN. (*Another drink.*) No?

JACK. No! Don't do that. It isn't that way at all. Things lead up to things, you know; they don't spring ...

GILLIAN. ... fully armed from the head of Zeus!

JACK. If you like. Though we may not know it right away. Suddenly we *know*.

GILLIAN. (*Sarcastic.*) Tell me about it! (*Tastes her drink.*) This stuff is *good*. Why didn't you get me started years ago; I could have done all those Susan Hayward pictures and everything ...

JACK. It's a realization.

GILLIAN. (*About drink.*) It certainly is. If I do it right I can get a lot of sympathy. "Poor dear; he drove her to it." "Cheated on her right and left." "He got someone to go to bed with him?" "So it would seem."

JACK. All right!!

GILLIAN. Just have to be sure it doesn't look like I like it.

JACK. I have come home to tell you I have had a revelation, and you *dither* at me; you mock, and you —

GILLIAN. (*Clenched and tense.*) I am talking so as not to scream!

JACK. I am at my office ...

GILLIAN. I never realized before how true that was — that cliché.

JACK. I am at my office ...

GILLIAN. (*Mocking; tough tone.*) Tell me about it, big boy.

JACK. (*Sighs.*) As I said ... I am at my office. I look up from my desk; I am sitting there in my usual manner, doing my usual things — and they are neither boring nor exciting: whatever they may have been they no longer are. They are merely my usual things. Well, I look up from them, am amazed by my familiar surroundings, am startled by the stranger who has been my secretary for fifteen years. I realize my life is about to change ... profoundly. Either that, or I am mad; and I am not mad. I am, perhaps, if anything, too on target. "Yes; quite interesting; my life is about to change, and profoundly," I say to myself, so to speak. "Profoundly!" "May I help you? Is there something I can do?" my stranger of fifteen years says to me. What is her name? Her name is absurdly Irish.

GILLIAN. Kath ...

JACK. No matter. "May I help you?" she says, her good face puzzled, her eyes, her ... steady, honest eyes browning on me. "No, no; it's nothing," I say to her. And she stares at me, not believing, wondering what nothing really is. "It's nothing," I repeat. Well, I can't say — especially to a total stranger, whether I've known her for fifteen years or not — "Yes, I think my life is undergoing the profoundest change." *Can I.* Most profound, I know. And so I send her off for something,

something I actually need though not very much, and I begin to mull it: what the fuck is happening!? If I am not mad — and I am not — then perhaps it is a collapse of a part of the brain, a stroke even. I am both hot and chill; my palms are sweating — something they have never done, or seldom — my palms are sweating, and the back of my neck is ice; I feel that if I were to turn my head my neck would break off, or crack, certainly, splinter, sending fissures down my spine and radiating. Surely I am all ice — to my wrists, where suddenly I am fire. All ice ... then fire. And then ... and then I am ... levitated, *levitating*, am leaving my body, leaving it where it is and leaving it, all at once, at one and the same time, am hanging there, above myself — as they say we do in dying, or can: hang above ourselves, observe ourselves as we die, unaware that we are observing, unaware that below we have slipped from the intensely conscious state in which we watch. I am aware that I am the object I am studying, that I am my own subject, or object, if you will. I become aware ... well, yes, that's it! I become aware of awareness I have never known before, of clarity, of ... revelation, I suppose. Mystics must have it, clairvoyants, the possessed. It all rushes to me, with all its reasons, its causes flying behind it like ribbons, the conclusions I have come to without even being aware I was arriving at them. Turn a corner of your mind, and there you are! There you are, where you want and need to be, without knowing you were journeying there, without knowing, even, that you needed and wanted to be there. Your mind tells you: I have figured it all out, it says, so to speak. Says, indeed! I have figured it all out: these are the conclusions you have come to, have needed to come to. Trust me! These are the proper conclusions. Here it is; this is how it is going to be; this is the future.

GILLIAN. Aahhhh!

JACK. Please! And ... and I sit there, and tears come, for it is so painful, and so sweet, and so ... emptying. And so I rise from my desk, returning to myself as I rise, and I close the door behind me, gently, and I know I drive home — though that is all mist. I come in here to you, where you are

reading. And you look up from your book. And then ... "I'm leaving you," I say.

GILLIAN. (After a long pause; softly.) Are you quite done?

JACK. Yes; I think so.

GILLIAN. I see.

JACK. Have you listened at all?

GILLIAN. Oh, yes.

JACK. I mean ... really listened. You can't be drunk yet.

GILLIAN. I wouldn't know. (Briefly vulnerable.) Would I? I mean ... not knowing, would I?

JACK. In any event ... (Leaves it unfinished.)

GILLIAN. Lovely speech.

JACK. Thank you.

GILLIAN. Honest ...

JACK. Thank you.

GILLIAN. Simple, if flowery ...

JACK. (Shrugs.) Well, you know ...

GILLIAN. ... an attempt at what might be referred to as ... troof.

JACK. What?

GILLIAN. Troof! An attempt at troof! T-R-O-O-F. Troof.

JACK. You mock everything, don't you?

GILLIAN. (Rising to it now.) What do you want? What do you expect ... riveted attention? Hand-folded, eye-wide, mouth-ajar attention!? And then what!? A hand out to pat you sympathetically on the wrists!? "I understand; I understand." Yes? Fuck you!

JACK. You are drunk.

GILLIAN. "Don't leave me, precious; I ... I'll be nothing without you."

JACK. Forget it!

GILLIAN. Fuck yourself! "Don't weave poor widda me! What wid I be wivout great big wu!?"

JACK. I said: forget it!!

GILLIAN. "Tell me 'u wuv me! Tell me I am your own." Hah! (Heavy mock.) Walk with me; talk with me; tell me I am your own. Hah! Asshole!

JACK. Drunk as a ... at least you're a cheap date.

GILLIAN. You'll find out!

JACK. (Sighs.) I dare say.

GILLIAN. Awww; poor baby! Going through a great big crisis and she isn't there to help?

JACK. Forget it. Just ... forget it.

GILLIAN. You're not dealing with your run-of-the-mill lady. You leave me you're giving up something pretty special.

JACK. Sure sure.

GILLIAN. Have I gotten too old for you? Too ... ripe? Are you not up to me anymore? Do I frighten you? Are you suddenly taken with men? It happens. Do you lust for your sister? You did when you were ten, you told me. Are you impotent ... as of the day before yesterday? Have you forgotten who you are? Who I am? Who you were I was? Is tomorrow Wednesday? Whatever is the matter? (Waits.) No? Nothing? (Pause. Jack begins slow, deliberate applause. Gillian smiles, bows, spreads her arms, curtsies, spreads her arms again; hold it.)

JACK. Brava.

GILLIAN. Thank you, thank you.

JACK. Quite a performance.

GILLIAN. Thank you.

JACK. (Sighs; shakes his head.) All we've been through together — the deaths, the losses ...

GILLIAN. Don't start.

JACK. Your father's awful dying, that cancer, that ...

GILLIAN. Stop it!

JACK. After all of that ... that sharing ... we come to this? And you don't understand me?

GILLIAN. I understand you!

JACK. No, no, you don't; you can't.

GILLIAN. Jesus Christ, you didn't come home here this afternoon to share anything; you didn't come home here this afternoon to be understood; you came home here this afternoon to make an announcement and then get out as fast as you could!

JACK. There are some things that are facts; there are some things we don't understand but the gut tells us...!

GILLIAN. Oh ... bullshit!

JACK. Yes; well. I think I'll go now.  
GILLIAN. NO!!

JACK. Oh, yes.

GILLIAN. You will *not* leave me.

JACK. I have *left* you.

GILLIAN. You will *not*!

JACK. I shall move to a hotel ... isn't that how one does it? (*Momentary self-disgust.*) Jesus! (*Back.*) Isn't that how it's done? I move to a hotel, taking a small bag of irrelevancies with me? I return when I know you're out and pack more sensibly? We agree on a lawyer and let him redefine our life together —

GILLIAN. Yeah, sure!

JACK. ... We divide our substance; we de-Siamese ourselves into our empty entities ...

GILLIAN. As the man said: nobody ever talked like that.

JACK. Do be still. We surface, finally, break through the murk — the oozy weeds, poor Billy ...

GILLIAN. Melville.

JACK. What?... Yes ... we surface finally.

GILLIAN. You're not up to this. Rhetoric is beyond you.

JACK. Yes. Well. You may be right. (*Rises, if Jack has been sitting.*) Well.

GILLIAN. (*Eyes narrowing.*) Yes?

JACK. Now I go for my little bag, open the drawer where we keep the irrelevancies, scoop up a double armful ...

GILLIAN. You're not going anywhere. (*Gillian moves to the bedroom.*)

JACK. ... dump them in, zip it up, look around, sigh ...

GILLIAN. (*Dismissive.*) Why don't you just shut up.

JACK. ... sigh, wonder, for just an instant, if perhaps the reason is not the final madness ...

GILLIAN. I said, shut up.

JACK. ... straighten up, pick up the bag and ... exit. (*Jack moves to wherever the bedroom may be.*)

GILLIAN. Sit down.

JACK. Excuse me. You're blocking me. (*Jack moves to one side; Gillian blocks him.*) I said, you're blocking me. (*Jack moves*

*to the other side; Gillian blocks him.*) You're blocking me!

GILLIAN. I'll block you!

JACK. (*Grabs her by the shoulders.*) Get out of my ...

GILLIAN. (*Fights to get his hands off of her.*) God ... damn ... you! (*NOTE: Now begins a serious physical fight, during which Gillian slaps him hard, Jack slaps her hard, Jack pushes her out of the way, Gillian grabs him from behind, they struggle, they fall on the floor, they roll over on top of one another, Jack rises, Gillian grabs him by the leg, dragging him down again, Gillian gets on top of him, pummels him, Jack strikes her, Gillian falls, Jack sits on her arms, Gillian knees him in the groin, they try to strangle each other, striking at each other, throwing each other around, trying to escape, trying to kill. Naturally, all this will have to be choreographed, to the possibilities of the actors, to the limits of practicality. During it, the following lines will be said, and some others may be said, as required — either repeats or extensions.*)

JACK. I'm leaving you!

GILLIAN. You will not leave me!

JACK. It's over! Get it through your head!

GILLIAN. You can't take a life together ...

JACK. When things are done they are done!

GILLIAN. You stupid, vapid — OW!

JACK. OW!

GILLIAN. I'll kill you rather than let you ...

JACK. Don't you dare do that ... OW! (*And so on, and so forth. In any event, they both end up on the floor, winded, wounded. Be sure the fight has grown in intensity, and has not been too brief. Finally: Up on one elbow. Can there be blood from his nose, say?*) Well.

GILLIAN. (*Slowly to a sitting position. Can there be blood from her mouth?*) Yes; well.

JACK. Are you alive?

GILLIAN. I believe so. You?

JACK. Yes; I think so. (*Silence; heavy breathing.*)

GILLIAN. You're pretty good.

JACK. So are you.

GILLIAN. Sorry about the knee.

JACK. You really get a man where he lives.

GILLIAN. That may be the problem.

JACK. Oh?

GILLIAN. You filth.

JACK. Don't. (Pause.) Well ... are you willing to admit this is serious?

GILLIAN. Yes; all right; yes, it's serious.

JACK. I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. So it would seem.

JACK. You almost killed me.

GILLIAN. I did not.

JACK. Yes; you did; you tried.

GILLIAN. (Making little of it.) I did not.

JACK. And you scratched me.

GILLIAN. Awwwww!

JACK. And you bit me.

GILLIAN. (Laughs.) I did not.

JACK. Fanged right in. I'll probably get hydrophobia.

GILLIAN. Thanks! Get a shot; get ten. Is that the same as rabies?

JACK. Is what?

GILLIAN. Is hydrophobia?

JACK. Yes. (Afterthought.) I think so.

GILLIAN. Serves you right — coming home like that, pulling this crap on me.

JACK. It is not crap; it is all true. I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. I shall pretend otherwise.

JACK. What good will it do you?

GILLIAN. (Cold.) It will allow me to avoid considering that I am being — what is the term? — "left ... in the lurch?", left, however, by someone less than the gesture demands.

JACK. (Sighs.) All right.

GILLIAN. (Colder.) If we are to be left it should be by someone we shall miss, someone whose leaving will produce a vacancy not only in our bed but in our heart, as they call it.

JACK. You'll miss me.

GILLIAN. I have missed you for years, and so why not now, you mean?

JACK. Leave off.

GILLIAN. (Colder.) If I am to be left alone — temporarily, I should imagine, knowing my ... charms — it should be by someone I shall miss; it should not be by someone so ... small, whose value is so little, about whom I could not care less, whose departure will not bother me in the least. You are ... nothing.

JACK. (Such a rational request.) Why ... don't you just ... stop it.

GILLIAN. (Relentless.) I have lived my life reasonably well. I have been a better wife than you have deserved. I have "hewn" to you far more than you have "hewn" to me. I have seen and denied seeing; I have comforted you when I thought you were despicable and unworthy of comfort. I have smiled at your side when I thought you were a fool and deserving of abandonment.

JACK. (Heavy sigh.) Oh, God.

GILLIAN. I have held you in the night when you have bolted up in bed in your sleep — HANH! — when you've bolted up still asleep in one of your nightmares. I've held you, comforted you, eased you back down, stroked you back into peaceful sleep, looked at you, known you were ... (Shakes her head.) ... not enough; that perhaps noone is enough. (Up from comforting to hard.) Certainly not you. So, go on; leave me; I'll survive it. You're not big enough for the gesture. You're ... nothing.

JACK. How odd, my problem has always been one of too much.

GILLIAN. Sure sure.

JACK. Too much, yes. Always, when I was young, at least. Very young. Too beautiful, too lucky, too this, too that.

GILLIAN. Sure sure. (Suddenly.) Too what? Too beautiful!?

JACK. (Matter-of-fact, as if Gillian were mad to question it.) Yes.

GILLIAN. You? Too beautiful?

JACK. You didn't know me when I was fifteen. When we met I was still very ... handsome, I suppose ... (Gillian starts laughing.) I was! Stop that! (Gillian does.) I pay proper attention to you: you pay proper attention to me.

GILLIAN. (Not at all.) Sorry.

JACK. You wouldn't call me ugly now — good face, not too much belly, nothing a little more self-respect wouldn't fix. You called me handsome on our second date: "My God, you're handsome!" you said.

GILLIAN. (*Wistful.*) I must have wanted something.

JACK. "My God, you're handsome," you said. "Thank you," I recall replying.

GILLIAN. Taking your due?

JACK. Well ... something.

GILLIAN. (*Triste.*) How have I put up with you for all these years?

JACK. I was ... handsome. We were quite a couple: you ... pert, me ...

GILLIAN. ... ravishing?

JACK. Something like that. But at fifteen.... My God! Didn't I ever show you the photos?

GILLIAN. I guess you just can't have everything. You poor thing.

JACK. I did. Be still.

GILLIAN. (*Too much.*) Oh, Jesus!

JACK. I used to glow; they said I glowed.

GILLIAN. Of course.

JACK. I don't doubt it.

GILLIAN. Light up the sky.

JACK. I don't doubt it; I glow now — in private, of course, when I'm by myself.

GILLIAN. (*Examining something on her skirt.*) Sure sure sure.

JACK. I mean, I'm not going to go around glowing for ... just anybody. Why waste your glow?

GILLIAN. (*Overly enthusiastic.*) Right!

JACK. A glow is special, and you never know how long it's going to last. I mean, you're going along, minding your own business, and you've been glowing now and again — nothing special, not so as to stop traffic, or anything.

GILLIAN. (*Bored.*) I understand. (*Under her breath.*) Jesus!

JACK. ... but you have been glowing, and one day somebody comes up to you — someone you've glowed for, maybe a year or so before — and says: "Glow for me again."

GILLIAN. "You haven't glowed for me in the longest time?"

JACK. (*Ignoring her as best he can.*) "Glow for me; glow for me again."

GILLIAN. (*Sweet/sour.*) "Little glowworm?"

JACK. What can you do? I mean, you can't say, "Out of my sight! I'm not going to glow for you; I've glowed for you." You can't say that.

GILLIAN. Of course not.

JACK. People deserve better than that. So you say to yourself; O.K., why not? And so you try to glow for them.... But you can't; there just isn't any glow.

GILLIAN. Glowed out, eh?

JACK. Well, not necessarily, maybe just for now — for *then*, maybe just for *then*. It'll probably come back, maybe you just don't have any glow in ya right then, as they say.

GILLIAN. Sort of like some other things.

JACK. Hm?

GILLIAN. (*Louder.*) Sort of like a lot of other things — ya just don't have it in ya right now. (*Indicates.*) The book is full of it.

JACK. (*Too loud.*) What are you talking about?

GILLIAN. Success and failure; good times and bad. Some nights you're Mr. Stud himself, and other times ya just don't have it in ya.

JACK. God, you're a vulgar woman. I was talking about *glowing!*

GILLIAN. (*Rueful smile.*) So was I.

JACK. Anyway ... I used to glow.

GILLIAN. (*Bored and dismissive.*) Sure sure.

JACK. I did. I was very special: dogs would fall in love with me, leave home, lie about my family's house and moon, wait for me; bicycles would appear, wheel themselves into the yard.... Oh, God, I have memories!

GILLIAN. (*Very patronizing.*) Yes, you do! You have a secret little treasure trove of them, along with your dance cards, your first rubber, three broken hearts ...

JACK. ... a wrapped-up ring finger ...

GILLIAN. ... the jock strap of the boy you were in love

with when you were thirteen but wouldn't ... a what!?

JACK. A wrapped-up ring finger.

GILLIAN. (After a beat.) There's no point in talking to you. You'll say anything. (Pause.) How did you know it was a ring finger?

JACK. You mean ... was the ring *on* it, or something like that?

GILLIAN. Or something like that.

JACK. Or maybe there was pale where the ring had been?

GILLIAN. Something like that.

JACK. Yes; well ... something like that.

GILLIAN. You'll say anything. (Shakes her head.) Nothing changes.

JACK. Oh, now ...

GILLIAN. (Shaking her head.) You would *think* ... that after a *while* ... that someone would learn a little *something* ...

JACK. Be careful of a little knowledge.

GILLIAN. Nothing changes.

JACK. *Everything* changes.

GILLIAN. Which is therefore the same thing, blah blah blah.

JACK. A little knowledge, et cetera.

GILLIAN. What?

JACK. "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," et cetera.

Pope.

GILLIAN. Name the spring!

JACK. What?

GILLIAN. Name the *spring*! If a little knowledge is so fucking dangerous, name the spring from which we are supposed to dip in and drink. Go on; name it.

JACK. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing ... (Remembering.) Drink ... drink deep or taste not the ... what?... from the something spring.

GILLIAN. Ha!

JACK. Drink deep or taste not the ... shit!

GILLIAN. HA!

JACK. It will *come* to me. It always does; these things always do.

GILLIAN. You're damned right a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

JACK. (Ugly.) It will *come* to me!

GILLIAN. (Casual.) What was it wrapped in?

JACK. Hm? What?

GILLIAN. What was it wrapped in? The ring finger; a wrapped-up ring finger, you said.

JACK. How would *I* know!? I made it up.

GILLIAN. Of course you made it up. But what was it wrapped in?

JACK. (Annoyed.) I don't know — silver foil, gauze, newspaper?! I don't know. Hibernian!!

GILLIAN. Newspaper?

JACK. Hibernian!! A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Drink deep or taste not the Hiber ... no, that's wrong.

GILLIAN. (Joy.) Hibernian spring!! Sunshine and breaking buds in Ireland?

JACK. I *said* I was wrong.

GILLIAN. (Glee.) Hibernian spring!!

JACK. (Really angry.) *Drop* it!

GILLIAN. (Little girl voice.) Yes, Daddy. (Normal.) Newspaper? The ring finger wrapped up in newspaper? Like a herring?

JACK. I don't *know*! I made it up; or I dreamed it; maybe I dreamed it.

GILLIAN. One of your nightmares?

JACK. I don't know. I made it up; or I dreamed it.

GILLIAN. I had a dream the other night.

JACK. Oh?

GILLIAN. Yes; I dreamt you loved me.

JACK. (Long pause.) I *do*.

GILLIAN. (Noncommittal.) Yes. I know.

JACK. I *do*.

GILLIAN. Well, you may *have*. Oh, what a wangled teb we weave.

JACK. A what?

GILLIAN. A teb; a wangled teb.

JACK. What is *that*?

GILLIAN. You figure it out.

JACK. (*Regret.*) There's so much good we've had between us.  
GILLIAN. Let it *alone*.

JACK. No!

GILLIAN. Let it *alone!*

JACK. No!!... Our first date? That was one of the good times.

GILLIAN. (*Far away.*) Was that good? It ... slips my mind.

JACK. It *was* one of the good times. No, it doesn't.

GILLIAN. May *be*. Was that the awful orchid corsage?

JACK. (*Smiles.*) Yes. The awful orchid corsage.

GILLIAN. Why *did* we ever date? — all I knew about you?

JACK. Because *of* it, probably. There were four of us on that date.

GILLIAN. Oh?

JACK. You; me; and the people we pretended to be — were pretending to be. Crowded in that little car, jockeying and all.

GILLIAN. I think we probably should have married *them* — the two we were pretending to be.

JACK. Or, they should have married each other? Perhaps they did.

GILLIAN. I wonder how it went with them. I wonder did it begin fine and stay that way — get better even? Are they your stock happy couple, or was it failure, prison, cancer, and all the rest? Lucky, in any event. At least nobody came home one day and said, "Hi there! I'm leaving you."

JACK. It hasn't been that bad! (*Gillian snorts.*) It hasn't. (*Gillian snorts.*) We've had a good run. (*Gillian snorts.*) Think about the good times; think how lucky we've *been*. We *have* been! (*Ibid.*) Concentrate on *them*.

GILLIAN. (*Pretending to try and concentrate.*) On the good times!

JACK. Come on!

GILLIAN. (*Grudgingly at first.*) One of the good times?

JACK. Please?

GILLIAN. Ah! Wasn't that something!? Do you remember Venice?

JACK. Of course I remember Venice. Nobody *can't* remember Venice; it can't be done.

GILLIAN. No no; I mean the time in Venice *I* remember.  
JACK. The first time? The time in the snow — in the gondola with the snow in our hair?

GILLIAN. No no.

JACK. The gondolier muffled like ... like Charon?

GILLIAN. No no.

JACK. The Grand Canal the River Styx; the silence ...

GILLIAN. No!

JACK. And the dislocation of it — the amazement — made me wonder why the snow was holding to the buildings — the palaces — but melting on the streets.

GILLIAN. (*Giggles.*) ... on the canals!

JACK. Yes, why the snow was melting on the water!

GILLIAN. Yes. (*Tiny pause.*) No; not that time.

JACK. (*A trifle sad.*) Not that time? The tapestried walls of our room beside the opera?

GILLIAN. No.

JACK. The great four-poster bed?

GILLIAN. No! The *other* time.

JACK. (*Thinks.*) The time of the floods, fall, the early floods, wading knee-deep in San Marco when the tray floated by, a full espresso and a half-eaten pastry?

GILLIAN. No; the other time.

JACK. (*At a loss.*) There *was* no other time.

GILLIAN. (*Gay.*) Of course there *was*!

JACK. (*Puzzled.*) No.

GILLIAN. It was an April — before the tourists and the stink — clear; a little windy, but clear.

JACK. I don't remember.

GILLIAN. (*Gay.*) Of course you do.

JACK. (*Very matter of fact.*) No; no, I don't.

GILLIAN. I arrived *before* you; I don't know where you'd been ... somewhere; it was one of those times we joined up.

JACK. (*Clear; quiet. Does Gillian hear him?*) There was no other time.

GILLIAN. You flew in; I waited for you at the hotel, in our room, bed down, negligee ...

JACK. Twice. That's all.

GILLIAN. (*Cajoling*.) Noooooo ...

JACK. (*Brisk*.) Yes; twice; that's all.

GILLIAN. I waited for you — deshabille — wine and a baby gorgonzola, late afternoon, still warm, bells beginning ...

JACK. (*Sort of sad*.) No.

GILLIAN. (*Happy*.) Yes! I heard you in the downstairs hall, the desk; I heard you on the stairs and into the room. I pretended to be asleep; I heard you put your bag down; I heard your shirt rustle: I heard you unzip your trousers ...

JACK. (*Matter of fact*.) It wasn't me.

GILLIAN. I opened my eyes to your advancing form, and ... no, it *wasn't* you, was it?

JACK. No; it *wasn't*.

GILLIAN. (*Pause*.) I'm sorry. I could have *sworn*.

JACK. I told you: no. (*Long pause*.)

GILLIAN. Well ... (*Matter of fact*.) Oops, as they say.

JACK. Don't say a word.

GILLIAN. Clearly I *remembered* it as you? *Wanted* it to be? Wished it *were*? No?

JACK. You're not helping. (*Turns; walks away*.)

GILLIAN. (*So simple; so contrite*.) I'm ... sorry.

JACK. (*Pause*.) Sometimes it hurts; sometimes it doesn't matter at all.

GILLIAN. Oh, come on! What are you playing ... injured party now?!

JACK. (*Weary*.) All right.

GILLIAN. Betrayed husband!?

JACK. (*Anger rising*.) I said all *right*.

GILLIAN. Faithful provider done in by vagrant ...

JACK. I said! Enough!

GILLIAN. (*Hard*.) I said I was sorry! I was! Take it while you can! (*Unhappy afterthought*.) Take what you can get.

JACK. (*Pause*.) I can't stand it when it's you.

GILLIAN. (*Weary*.) Oh, God!

JACK. When it's me I understand it and I accept it.

GILLIAN. Sure! Of course!

JACK. I *expect* it of me.

GILLIAN. Macho man.

JACK. No! I *expect* it of me. I know what I am, how I am. You know I cheat; I know you know I cheat. It hurts me that you know it; it hurts me that when I'm off you think I'm cheating; it hurts me that you hurt, that you have enough experience of me to suspect, whether I am or not ... hurt by probability.

GILLIAN. (*Simple, nonrancorous truth*.) Once is all it takes.

JACK. And it means nothing! None of it means ... it means nothing! None of it! What kind of animal *are* we!? We do what instinct tells us — all of us. There *are* monogamous creatures — a few birds, I think, one type of something-or-other, some type of ... weasel, or something, but that's what instinct tells them. Instinct tells *us*, tells *us*, *too*. Instinct tells us when the mind and the appetite get together it's then time to do it, and with or to whatever is nearby and to be fancied.

GILLIAN. (*Dry*.) I love you when you're like this.

JACK. Why does "I love you" mean "I vow not to put this into that?"

GILLIAN. ... or vice versa.

JACK. ... or vice versa. "I will not let that be put into this."

GILLIAN. (*Looking off*.) No reason I can think of.

JACK. I mean ... what?

GILLIAN. ... save love, honor and cherish.

JACK. Well, *there* you have something. Love!? I love you, I love you deeply, sadly and deeply, and I am — oh, God! the horrid word — I am "unfaithful" to you. Not that you are not to me. I *honor* you: I will not permit you to be dishonored — it is one of the things I would probably kill for. Cherish? Well, you *know* I cherish you.

GILLIAN. Me, the Mercedes and the free play of your instincts. It won't do. You're not even sophistic: you're dense.

JACK. The joy is all gone from it. The relief, the pleasure of the relief, of the moment, all that's still there, but no joy. Joy is all gone. I do it by habit ... reflex. Sometimes I look up from it and say, "Why am I here? Am I ... am I doing this for pleasure? Or by rote. Rutting by rote?"

GILLIAN. Do shut up.

JACK. Hm?

GILLIAN. Do ... shut ... up.

JACK. Once ... once I turned, looked into a face, said: "Why am I here?" Smile; "Comfort," the face said; "To pass the time less ... emptily?"

GILLIAN. (Very casual.) Is it always a woman?

JACK. (Not avoiding; preoccupied.) I wish to be alone in it. I can't stand it when it's *you*. "My wife is married, *I'm not*," a man said to me one time; I was sixteen, a summer job. He was fat, a large man and fat, three chins. "My wife's married, *I'm not*." A wink and a leer. God, who would have fucked him?!

GILLIAN. (Still casual.) There's someone to fuck everyone. Those don't get it don't want it, or surely don't want it from those they can get. The trick is to want what you can get.

JACK. I don't *want* these people; I have them without wanting them — without wanting *them*. I want relief and comfort and company and coming; and ... it means nothing.

GILLIAN. (Long pause.) To whom?

JACK. (Long pause.) Hm?

GILLIAN. (Long pause.) Nothing. I'm sorry about Venice.

JACK. Oh?

GILLIAN. I *did* think it was you. I wasn't setting you up. I *did* think it was you when I remembered it. Not at the *time*, you understand: I'm not careless — or near-sighted. A face above me, huffing and all, I can ... I know who and all, I can ... I know who it is — the small of a back, a cock, one knows these things in the dark.

JACK. (Truly interested.) Really?

GILLIAN. Oh, yes. Tactile. The blind have it; women, too.

JACK. Really!

GILLIAN. (Snorts.) God, you'll believe anything!

JACK. (Defensive; little boy.) Sometimes we *want* to.

GILLIAN. (Thinks.) My God, it's my birthday next week. I'll be ... and what have you gotten for me? What will you have gotten for me ... my freedom? A ruby ring? Contrition? Two tickets for something I said I didn't want to see? Stay tuned!

Do you still care, by the way?

JACK. (Preoccupied.) What? Pardon?

GILLIAN. (Matter of fact.) Do you still care? Does cause and effect still interest you? (Jack shakes his head at her with wonder.) Do you wonder at the progress any more, or do you assume the pattern works — still works — that whatever damage was begun goes about its business? Proceeds? I ask you this because you must have thought about it some time ...

JACK. (So weary.) What are you talking about?

GILLIAN. I mean ... when you first hurt me — when you first hurt me that I knew you were doing it — you must have known you *had* ... you must have known you were doing it; and with *what*? pleasure? rue? regret, even?

JACK. You never listen; you humor me; you think you know what everything means — everything I say. I suppose I mean you think you've heard all the resonances. You haven't, you know. You've heard all you're *going* to hear, though, I suppose.

GILLIAN. No! You never listen! Your mind is always cocked for something else, something; you don't know what, but something. I see it in your eyes; I see you not listen.

JACK. Animal! Animal Instinct!

GILLIAN. (Weary, quietly.) Oh, Christ, not that again.

JACK. Instinct tells us everything: that if there are rules run counter to our gut, then *they* are wrong; we are animals, and we smell the kill and the rest is fine unless it gets in the way. We understand it *all* when we become animals, when we give in to it — standing at night in the forest, in the snow when we become the wolf: *then* we understand it. Man is different; man is the lordly beast. We know these things by gut; when passion dies ...

GILLIAN. (Once again; weary.) Passion in a marriage never dies; it changes. When the passion of passion wanes there are all the others waiting to rush in — the passion of loss, of hatred, the passion of indifference; the ultimate, the finally satisfying passion of nothing. You know nothing of passion; you confuse rut with everything.

JACK. (Weary shake of the head.) No; no, I don't. No, we don't: we ... hunters and killers.

GILLIAN. You know nothing of ... enough.

JACK. (*Energized.*) I have discovered ... now, don't laugh at me.

GILLIAN. I'm *not*. I *won't*, rather.

JACK. Well, just ... *don't*. What I have discovered is this: nothing is enough.

GILLIAN. (*Under her breath.*) Jesus Christ!

JACK. Please? (*A hand up.*) Please? All right? (*Gillian nods, or shrugs.*) Nothing is enough ... for a life, I mean. No matter the challenges, the variety of challenge — contradiction, even — no matter *what* ... variety or constancy, we come to the moment we understand, if we are *honest* ...

GILLIAN. ... with *ourselves* ... or is this not that part?

JACK. This may be one of the last times we'll ever have a chance to try this hard, so ... please be good?

GILLIAN. (*Hopeless.*) Sure.

JACK. Life fills us with ... such a sense of choice — that everything is out there to be done, to be proved: that we live forever, always have forever in front of us ... to do everything! And we do, and we do not ... and it all goes.

GILLIAN. (*Comforting.*) You do have a gloomy mind. You foolish man with your foolish gloomy mind.

JACK. (*A hand up; sad.*) Not now. We come to the moment we understand that no matter what we have done — forget *not* done, forget the ... avoiders! — no matter what we have done, no matter how satisfying, how brave, how ... "good," no matter what, *or* where, *or* with whom, we come to the moment we understand that nothing has made any difference. We stare into the dark and know that nothing is enough, *has* been enough, *could* be enough, that there is *no way* not to have ... wasted the light; that the failure is built into us, that the greatest awareness gives to the greatest dark. That I'm going to lose you, for example — *have* lost you — no more, no less than fingers slipping from each other, that I'm going to lose *me*, *have* lost me — the light ... losing the light.

GILLIAN. (*Pause.*) Oh, poor darling. You know it, too. Then why rush it?

JACK. (*Sad; a wry smile.*) Awareness is all?

GILLIAN. Well, it's certainly enough. What would we *do*? What are we supposed to *do*, for God's sake? Are we sup-

posed to get *married* again? I can't have children anymore; I can't make a full marriage: I'm shaped to you. You can take up with some chippie, I suppose ...

JACK. Stop about chippies! This is not about chippies!

GILLIAN. (*Not to be deterred.*) You can take up with some chippie, pretend it's love when it's really desperate, and ludicrous and ...

JACK. Stop.

GILLIAN. You can ... kid yourself, pretend you don't know how sad you look, how ... pathetic.

JACK. I said, stop!

GILLIAN. We're not a hundred; we're not "ooooooollllldddd"; we've got some life left in us — some half-life, maybe — but ... we're thirty years into this ...

JACK. I know, I know.

GILLIAN. ... thirty years into knowing what marriage is all *about* — and what it is *not* all about. We *know* things! This is not our *first* marriage, friend; this is *marriage*.

JACK. (*Dogmatic.*) Everything has its duration; everything has a time when it goes on for the sake of going on, and ...

GILLIAN. You're too smart to kid yourself, you know.

JACK. (*Rage.*) I *know* I'm smart!

GILLIAN. (*Offhand.*) You're so *dumb*.

JACK. (*Softer.*) You're impossible.

GILLIAN. (*Glum.*) And you're hopeless. (*Tiny pause.*) Play games with *your* life; don't play 'em with *mine*.

JACK. (*Stentorian; heavy irony.*) Irrevocably intertwined, he cannot make a move without it touches her — nor can she begin a thought without it ...

GILLIAN. (*Toneless.*) Go fuck yourself. Is this really it then? All the years of it? Is this really it? Has everything been leading to this? Is it really mud pies we've been making all this time?

JACK. I suppose.

GILLIAN. Then I hope what's-his-name was right, that marriage does *not* make two people one, it makes two people two — a good marriage, a useful marriage — makes individuals! That when two people choose to be together though they're

strong enough to be alone, *then* you have a good marriage. Has ours been a good marriage? Are we two? Clearly we've not become each other; we've become ourselves — I guess we have, and maybe for the first time. With any luck we've not compensated, we've complemented. Well, at least that's how it's supposed to go. Aren't we lucky!? Aren't we wise, rational people!?

JACK. (*Preoccupied.*) Yes. of course.

GILLIAN. Nothing is certain in this world, *is* it? A lot of things are predictable — you, for example, and everything about you — but very little is certain. (*A silence; Jack looks out "window."*) What? (*Silence.*) What is it? What? What is it?

JACK. It's time for the garden; it *would* be time for the garden.

GILLIAN. Yes! Go dig the garden; put the garden in. (*Jack shakes his head.*) Yes! Put it *in!*

JACK. (*Hopeless.*) Don't you know what hopeless means? (*Silence. Rage.*) WHY WOULD I PUT IN A FUCKING GARDEN!!!!???

GILLIAN. (*Gentle; quiet.*) You put in a garden every year; you always have; it's hopeless every year — everything: the garden, going on, everything. You put in a garden; you do it every year. It is ... what you do. (*Leans toward him; loud whisper.*) That is what you do. (*A silence.*)

JACK. Oh, Lord, I long to live by instinct, not just respond to it from time to time. I no longer know whether ...

GILLIAN. Just ... scatter some seeds.

JACK. (*A sigh.*) Oh, there are times I wish ... you and I, I mean ... there are times I wish.

GILLIAN. (*Gentle.*) Something will come up. (*A long silence.*)

JACK. (*Finally; no emotion.*) I'm leaving you.

GILLIAN. (*Long silence; finally; no emotion.*) Yes. I know.

JACK. (*Long silence; little boy.*) I am.

GILLIAN. (*Long silence; gentle.*) I know; I know you are. (*They sit, silence; no movement.*)

END

## PROPERTY LIST

Journal: *The Book of Days* (GILLIAN)

Briefcase (JACK)

Magazine (GILLIAN)

Bottle of booze (GILLIAN)

Drinking glass (GILLIAN)